



Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights

Summary of Findings from Committee Stakeholder Events

Background

1. As part of the Committee's consultation process, Members agreed for a series of stakeholder events to take place in order to reach a large number of people, particularly those in the more hard-to-reach groups.
2. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, these stakeholder events were delivered via virtual platforms. The Committee is very grateful for the work carried out by the Northern Ireland Assembly Engagement team, who have been involved in all aspects of planning, organising and promoting these events – not to mention their help in the technical side of online engagement.
3. The stakeholder events took place as follows:
 - **Older People** (Tuesday 16 March 2021)
 - **Religious and Cultural Groups** (Thursday 25 March 2021)
 - **LGBTQ+** (Tuesday 20 April 2021)
 - **People with a physical disability and carers** (Wednesday 21 April 2021)
 - **People with a learning disability** (Friday 23 April 2021)
 - **Women** (Tuesday 27 April 2021)
 - **General Public** (Tuesday 27 April 2021)
 - **Human Rights Consortium** (Wednesday 28 April 2021)
 - **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities** (Wednesday 28 April 2021)
 - **Children and Young People** (Wednesday 5 May 2021)
4. In addition to these stakeholder events, the Committee worked in partnership with a number of organisations to obtain the views of the following groups, following advice from organisations in the community and voluntary sector that this would be the most effective way of engaging with them:
 - **Travellers** (facilitated by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive);
 - **Refugees and Asylum Seekers** (facilitated by the Red Cross who held workshops in English, Somali, Arabic and Tigrinya to facilitate the participation of individuals with a variety of immigration status);

- **People affected by homelessness** (facilitated by Women's Aid).
5. The Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service also conducted a series of **focus groups with primary and post-primary school children across all school sectors** in Northern Ireland.
 6. One event, scheduled to engage with the **Business sector**, had to be cancelled due to the lack of availability of stakeholders. This situation was not unique to the Ad Hoc Committee when attempting to engage with businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Format of Stakeholder Events

7. Participants joined the stakeholder events via Zoom and were welcomed by the Chairperson and Members of the Committee in attendance. The Committee Clerk provided a background to the establishment of the Committee and its work to date and explained some of the key concepts. Participants were then invited to work in smaller groups within 'breakout rooms' (facilitated by Committee staff) to discuss three questions. The questions were:
 - (i) ***Question 1: How important, if at all, do you think a bill of rights is for Northern Ireland, and why?***
 - (ii) ***Question 2: What are your views on including a preamble (or introduction) for a bill of rights setting out a vision or ideas for society here?***
 - (iii) ***Question 3: What rights, if any, would you like to see protected in a bill of rights?***
8. Participants were then provided the opportunity to feedback their views on the three questions to the main group. The Chairperson and Members of the Committee were in attendance for this feedback session.

9. All stakeholder events were recorded for the purposes of note-taking; a summary of each session has been provided below.

Executive Summary

10. The Committee held ten stakeholder events with 170 people engaging with the Committee.
11. In addition, a further 36 people (approximately) were involved in sessions with Travellers and Refugees/Asylum Seekers and people affected by homelessness.
12. On the question, “***How important, if at all, do you think a bill of rights is for Northern Ireland, and why?***”, there was an overwhelming majority that felt a bill of rights was very important and long overdue. This is in keeping with the results of the Committee’s survey. Many participants thought that a bill of rights could provide important rights protections, especially for the vulnerable.
13. Many groups were eager for a bill of rights to be actionable, forward-thinking, in an accessible format (including multi-lingual) and easy to understand – a programme of education would be crucial in making a bill of rights user-friendly.
14. Another common theme was that a bill of rights should be centred around equality. Many groups highlighted the diverse nature of Northern Ireland in the twenty-first century and a desire to move away from an ‘orange and green’ society.
15. On the question, “***What are your views on including a preamble (or introduction) for a bill of rights setting out a vision or ideas for society here?***”, there was broad agreement from all groups that a preamble, setting out a vision and values for Northern Ireland, was valuable.
16. The majority of groups discussed whether a preamble should be aspirational or actionable, with concerns raised that a balance had to be struck between these.

Many participants also wanted the preamble to be easy to interpret with a preference for it being in layman's terms.

17. Many values were raised by the groups, with equality, dignity, respect, fairness and opportunity being the most commonly discussed. Other values included compassion, inclusion and strength in diversity. Once again, this is in keeping with the results from the Committee's survey.
18. On the question, "***What rights, if any, would you like to see protected in a bill of rights?***", there was a wide-ranging discussion within each group. As would be expected, each group was primarily concerned with rights that impacted their own sector/community, however, a number of groups raised the issue of intersectionality and the fact that many rights are cross-cutting.
19. The most commonly discussed rights were around disability, access to healthcare, mental health, education, housing, social security, language, equality and freedom from discrimination. This mirrors the results the Committee received from its survey.
20. One other issue that was raised consistently was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people's human rights.

Older People (Tuesday 16 March 2021)

21. Our first stakeholder event was with older people – the Committee and our colleagues in Engagement worked closely with Age NI to promote the event and maximise attendance. 29 people booked a place on the session, with **23 in attendance on the day.**

Question 1:

The group was **overwhelmingly in favour** of a bill of rights. It was said that, for many, a vote for the Good Friday Agreement was a vote for a bill of rights. It should be based on the **same rights that all citizens enjoy around the world.** The importance of **engagement with the**

Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community was highlighted. It was thought that there needs to be serious dialogue to address the fear that increased equality diminishes their Britishness.

“A bill of rights – an absolute yes”

“A document that every person can read and understand”

“It’s hard to argue against having a bill of rights but because of its symbolism it may mean different things to different communities; for example, some people might think it is helpful, whereas others might think it should not have happened in the first place”

Question 2:

Most **supported a preamble/introduction** – some discussions centred around how a preamble should come after the establishment of a bill of rights; a summation of the content.

Participants also stated that a preamble should be built on **respect** and should be in **layman’s terms**.

“I would like a preamble to lose the idea that there are two communities or two traditions in Northern Ireland. I would like to include cosmopolitanism, constant change and innovation as guiding principles or visions”

“One of the basic rights is to understand a preamble”

“I would like to suggest a specific statement that we should aim to be good neighbours, I think that is the most essential characteristic to have in this part of the world. We go out of our way to give offence and take offence and as a priority we should be good neighbours”

Question 3:

Discussions naturally centred around issues that impact older people including rights to **protect vulnerable older people**; rights to **protect people with a disability**; the **right to remain at home** and independent living.

Participants also agreed that **digital inclusion**, **access to Wi-Fi** and **connectedness** was important going forward.

“Each right needs to reference other rights, for example mental health is impacted upon by things like absence from freedom of speech; by lack of respect because I am elderly or infirm or have a learning difficulty. It is also impacted upon by the quality of air that I breathe”

“Protection for people who cannot access technology”

“Lessons from the pandemic need to be built into a bill of rights”

“As an individual it is fundamentally my inalienable right to decide when I chose to die and how. However, the systems and structures of society would dispute that”

“Elderly people to have the respect and care that they need”

Religious and Cultural Groups (Thursday 25 March 2021)

22. The stakeholder event with Religious and Cultural Groups received bookings from 23 individuals, with **18 in attendance on the day**. A number of organisations were represented including the Evangelical Alliance, Community Relations Council, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Féile an Phobail and the North West Cultural Partnership.

Question 1:

There was some **diversity of opinion**, not only on the need for a bill of rights, but also how extensive a bill of rights should be. Some participants were concerned that **a more detailed bill of rights could entrench division**. There were also discussions on how Christian values are viewed in today's secular society, with some feeling marginalised.

“Changing hearts and minds is important – it is about mutual respect”

“We need to embrace all faiths going forward”

“At some stage it is going to set one group against another when my rights or your rights impinge upon each other's rights”.

“We suggested that we didn't really need a bill of rights, but we are not wedded to that idea; but we felt that on balance there was sufficient

provision in law and in procedures to cover most of the human rights issues”.

Question 2:

Whilst there was agreement on the need for a preamble, there was a range of views on what it should contain; **language and interpretation** is key in this matter. Opinions included that the preamble should be the sum total of a bill of rights and that it should set the tone for a bill of rights. There was some emphasis on **responsibilities and relationships alongside rights, with a suggestion that these were like a ‘three-legged stool’.**

“The problem comes when it is so broad”

“Enshrine right to life in the preamble”

“Rights, responsibilities and relationships, we need to have those in balance”.

“From a Christian point of view there is a concern that much of the agenda is driven by a secular mind-set. That’s a fundamental concern I think many of us would share and because of that I think there is a slight reticence to encourage a further growth of what we might see as something not entirely in tune with a faith view of life.”

Question 3:

There was discussion around whether a bill of rights should address the ‘particular circumstances’ of Northern Ireland and the balance between **aspirational** and the **ability to legislate**.

Some rights that were suggested included **freedom of speech, language rights** and the **protection of Christian views**.

“A lot of it comes back to civic duties and responsibilities”

“The broader you make it, the more divisive you make it”

“Cultural rights protected on all sides”

“The right to life of the unborn child”

“We should have the right to express Christian views in society. It is enshrined in Section 75 that religious groups should be protected; I haven’t always felt that that is the case in a secular society”.

LGBTQ+ (Tuesday 20 April 2021)

23. For our stakeholder event with representatives of the LGBTQ+ community, the Committee and our colleagues in Engagement worked closely with TransgenderNI and the Rainbow Project. 11 people booked a place on the session, with **8 in attendance on the day**.

Question 1:

All participants were in agreement – a bill of rights is **extremely important**. There were discussions around the **formal recognition** a bill of rights would afford the LGBTQ+ community, how it would **set standards** and the **legal protection** it would bring. Significant gaps in education and healthcare protections for the LGBTQ+ community were highlighted. Some participants noted that the rights of the LGBTQ+ community are often viewed as being up for debate.

There was a view that Section 75 had fallen short and that there was currently a patchwork of rights, and that a bill of rights could help to mitigate these issues and lead us to a rights-based society.

“A bill of rights can help underpin societal change”

“Important to enforce and strengthen rights”

“I think a bill of rights is incredibly important for Northern Ireland: there are significant gaps in equality and human rights legislation currently. There are pretty glaring examples that would include, in particular, in schools for LBGTQ+ pupils”

“It would particularly important for the LBGTQ+ community because we are invisible when it comes to most legislation and policy”

Question 2:

The group had broad agreement on the need for a preamble, however, some raised some concerns if the preamble was to be the priority. There was support for it being **aspirational** and a **benchmarking tool**, but it was

thought that consideration needed to be given to **language** and **interpretation**.

Some suggested that a preamble could reflect how far Northern Ireland has come. Key values discussed included equality, fairness, diversity, vision, compassion and inclusion, and showing that people matter.

“Diversity strengthens us as a community”

“A preamble should be short, punchy and matter of fact”

“I think in terms of a preamble we need to reflect how far Northern Ireland has actually come and how diverse our society is at the moment. We are in a completely different place than we were 30 years ago. I think it also needs to reflect that we are now a multicultural society”

“It should set a vision of what we want this place to look like and how we want it to operate in terms of respect, inclusion and diversity. In terms of defining values I think that is really important”

Question 3:

The group stated that they would take all rights available, but mentioned a number of particular rights that impact the LGBTQ+ community, including: **freedom of expression, freedom from discrimination, the right to a private life, housing rights and issues around healthcare**. There was also an emphasis on the right to a private and family life. Participants also discussed the indivisibility of rights and the need to ensure that a bill of rights can evolve over time.

“So many rights are cross-cutting”

“How will a bill of rights match the test of time?”

“The right to freedom from discrimination and the right to live your life freely should be included”

People with a physical disability and carers (Wednesday 21 April 2021)

24. 15 people booked a place on the stakeholder event with people with a physical disability and carers – there were **9 in attendance on the day**.

Question 1:

There was **broad agreement** that a bill of rights should be created, especially in the context of providing a **minimum standard for policy-makers** to adhere to and helping those that are **vulnerable** and **isolated** (rural communities mentioned).

Some participants raised some **concerns** on a bill of rights; namely the **discord** it could bring in trying to get agreement in terms of definitions and that it has the potential to be **too wide ranging** and therefore **open to interpretation**.

“Aspiration that everyone will be treated equally”

“It draws a line under what we accept as a minimum”

“I think we need to build ourselves a future that protects the weakest and most vulnerable in society irrespective of who they are or what they are”

Question 2:

The group felt that a preamble/introduction was **important**, but that it would be useful to see what was contained in a bill of rights before it was developed. The values of **equality, dignity, social justice** and **respect** were to the forefront of discussions.

There were concerns that too much emphasis would be placed on ‘orange and green’ when in fact Northern Ireland is much more diverse.

“Stress that a bill of rights is for everyone”

“A preamble should be short, concise, punchy and to the point”

“A living document”

“Dignity would be very important because it is something that people with disabilities often suffer from, lack of dignity”

“We want to make sure that it points out that there should be respect for absolutely everyone”

Question 3:

A wide range of rights were raised by the group, with socio-economic and cultural rights to the fore, as it was felt that these rights had the biggest impact on people with a disability and carers. Equality of access was mentioned, specifically access to healthcare and internet. Other rights talked about include the right to social security, including recognising the contribution of carers, the right to a good standard of living, the freedom to move freely and environmental rights.

“The economic contribution of carers needs recognised”

“People with disabilities should be able to access social security as a right and not feel a loss of dignity when doing it”

“Over the past number of years, even before the pandemic struck, the health and inequalities across our community was getting wider and wider in particular areas. I think it is very important that a bill of rights puts in place some mechanism that will counteract the growing inequalities in access to good healthcare”.

People with a learning disability (Friday 23 April 2021)

25. Our next stakeholder event was with people with a learning disability. A great deal of work and preparation for the session was carried out by Positive Futures, NOW Group and Mencap – representatives from each of these organisations acted as a facilitator in each of the ‘breakout rooms’. 24 people booked a place on the session, with **25 in attendance on the day**.

Question 1:

The group were in **agreement** that a bill of rights should be created – some were surprised that Northern Ireland didn’t already have one. Some participants highlighted that they would like to be listened to and have the **freedom of choice** to do what they want to do. Equality was at the centre

of the discussion. Many thought a bill of rights would lead to a fairer and more inclusive society.

The other major issue raised was ensuring that support should be available to **help people understand what a bill of rights is and how it impacts them**. It is important that this is available in an **accessible format**.

“People who aren’t always heard – make sure they have a voice”

“A bill of rights should be implemented with care and consideration”

“Would offer people peace of mind as they know they would be protected”

“I feel that to protect every individuals rights we need something like this in place”

Question 2:

A number of words were at the centre of the discussion around a preamble – **equality, fairness, human dignity, respect, consent and opportunities**.

Once again, the group highlighted the importance of the accessibility of a bill of rights – this includes versions in braille and pictures to make it easy to understand.

“Strength in diversity”

“The thing I would put in an intro is just layout what is in this document, for example, it should highlight the fact that everybody is equal, no special people, everybody should be treated the same”

“If new people came to Northern Ireland we should treat them with kindness and respect”

Question 3:

There was a **wide-ranging** discussion on what rights people would like to see included in a bill of rights – **equality** was a common theme throughout. Some of the main points raised were **freedom of movement and accessibility** (in relation to healthcare, public transport, public toilets), **identity rights, healthcare rights**, rights to equal marriage, **freedom from discrimination**, the right to a family life **and rights associated with work and environmental rights**.

“Right to be healthy and live in good conditions”

“Right to feel safe in your own home”

“The right to equality, people should not be judged on who they identify as or what their abilities are”

“The right for freedom of movement, the right to be able to travel and see friends. I know what it is like not to be able to do this long before lockdown and a part of you dies inside because a lot of freedom of movement is attached to your future and things to look forward too as well. The right to leave somewhere you are not happy is crucial and all humans need that”

Women (Tuesday 27 April 2021)

26. The stakeholder event with women received bookings from 27 individuals, with **19 in attendance on the day**. A number of organisations were represented including the Women’s Support Network, the Women’s Resource and Development Agency and the Northern Ireland Women’s Rural Network. Some of these organisations were reporting back on focus groups that had been held in advance of this session.

Question 1:

There was a **strong support** for the creation of a bill of rights – many feeling that this was very important for Northern Ireland. A number of issues were discussed that related directly to women, including **access to abortion, healthcare in relation to menopause, welfare reform** and the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

Another major point raised was that a bill of rights must be clear and easy to understand – with **education** the key to this.

Other issues raised included access to justice and that a bill of rights could protect the most vulnerable.

“Concrete – not aspirational”

“It’s not good enough for a bill of rights to just exist on paper”

“A bill of rights must be actionable”

"A bill of rights is about making good on a promise. In theory rights for women are there, but they are not being implemented"

Question 2:

There was a general agreement for the inclusion of a preamble, but, once again, the discussion centred around the need for the **enforcement** of rights and ensuring they are **accessible, understood and actionable**. The **diversity** of Northern Ireland was highlighted, with a move away from just two communities and the need for acceptance of others who are different from us and of all cultures. This also raised the issue of **intersectionality**.

A preamble needs to be easy to understand and translated into other languages.

"It is useful to set the tone and purpose of a bill of rights"

"A preamble shouldn't be a replacement of rights"

"Preamble needs to be sharp, clear and concise – no waffle"

"Values need to be lived and demonstrated by our MLAs"

Question 3:

The group agreed that **all rights** need to be included, however, the discussion mainly centred around **socio-economic and cultural rights**. There was specific mention of issues that have a disproportionate impact on women, including **welfare reform, poverty, living wage, housing** and **representation in politics**, as well as **discrimination** and sexual harassment.

The group also mentioned that they would like to see the full implementation of **CEDAW** and there was also support for **environmental rights**.

"Demonstrating value for women in a bill of rights"

"We would like to see some clarity on the rights of refugees and ethnic minorities. We would like to see their rights implemented and that they are not discriminated against"

"All rights are connected. We cannot separate them"

"Access to mental health services and the right to make decisions that affect the family and their health"

General Public (Tuesday 27 April 2021)

27. A 'catch all' stakeholder event for the general public was arranged for people who did not sit within the prescribed groups or were unavailable on other dates. 11 people booked a place on the session, with **5 in attendance on the day**. Organisations represented included Children's Law Centre, the Core Issues Trust and Compassionate Communities.

Question 1:

There was consensus within the group that a bill of rights was **very important** for Northern Ireland, with a view that it would localise human rights and protect minorities.

Some protections that the group would like to see to the fore are **children's rights** (the implementation of UNCRC), **end of life care**, **disability rights** and those in a **minority within a minority**.

"End of life – a right that affects us all"

"A bill of rights is really, really important, it is a chance to build on the previous work done on rights since the Good Friday Agreement"

"It gives Northern Ireland a fantastic opportunity to be at the forefront of rights on the world stage"

Question 2:

The majority of the group were in **support** of a preamble and values, with **human dignity, compassion, equality** and **individual wellbeing** mentioned.

One member of the group was **sceptical** over a preamble, stating that one group should not be able to override others.

In line with findings from previous events, there was a view that Northern Ireland is not simply 'orange and green'. It was thought that a preamble could help build towards a progressive society.

"Values should be anchored in equality"

"It is hard to balance everyone's need for dignity"

“To build a progressive society we need to move away from the old ‘two communities’ idea in this country. The diversity we have now in Northern Ireland needs to be embraced and everyone who lives here or who comes to this country should be given access to all the same rights”

Question 3:

There was a broad discussion on the types of rights that should be included in a bill of rights – many centred around the organisations that were in attendance. These rights included the **right to die**, the **right to decide one’s own trajectory**, the **right to run for election**, rights related to the **UNCRC**, **accessibility** (pavements/housing/education) and the **right to bereavement leave**.

“The implementation of UNCRC would set a minimum standard on how children are treated”

“Everyone should have the right to die if they are suffering, no-one else should be able to make that decision for us”

“Of primary importance would be the right to for anyone to have some sort of access to mental health treatment in a timely manner especially coming out of lockdown. We already had a mental health crisis in this country and without something drastic being done about it, I fear it will be ten times worse”

Human Rights Consortium (Wednesday 28 April 2021)

28. Following a direct request to the Committee, a stakeholder event was held with representatives of the Human Rights Consortium. A wide range of organisations and individuals attended the event, many of whom have engaged with the Committee throughout this process. 18 people booked a place on the session, with **17 in attendance on the day**.

Question 1:

Whilst the overwhelming response to this question was that a bill of rights is **essential**, there was a **sense of frustration** that it was not introduced following the Good Friday Agreement.

There was a discussion on the centrality of a bill of rights within the safeguards of the Agreement.

There was a view that **peace is precarious** and a bill of rights could help to protect it.

There were also concerns that **Section 75** is not sufficiently protecting all groups and that **rights are at risk** at Westminster.

Some common themes came through in the discussions including the need to have **equality** at the core of a bill of rights, ensuring it is **future proof**, a parallel **programme of education** on a bill of rights and ensuring it was in a **language that people can understand**.

“A bill of rights is critical and should underpin everything in our society”

“Transcending the orange/green narrative”

“There is a real expectation of the delivery of a bill of rights”

“The advantages are that it would have fulfilled this specific and core promise around the rights infrastructure that should have been in place for the Good Friday agreement and for those institutions flowing from the GFA. I think as a result those institutions and that system of government would have worked far more efficiently”

Question 2:

The group were in **favour** of a preamble, but had some clear opinions on what it should do and look like.

It was felt that a preamble could provide useful **interpretation** to a bill of rights as a whole, but it **must not detract from the substantive rights**. A preamble should be **underpinned by equality**, should be infused with **UN treaties**, be in **layman’s terms** and should be accompanied by a **public information and education programme**.

Values included **respect, dignity, autonomy and non-discrimination**.

“Needs basis vs rights basis”

“You need the meat on the bones”

“Equality is like a gold thread running through the whole concept of human rights”

“A preamble can play an important function in setting out that wider vision that we are trying to achieve with a bill of rights”

Question 3:

The group were keen for a bill of rights to not only **incorporate** existing UN Treaties, but also to **enhance** the relevant protections. A bill of rights could provide a valuable tool for the **Programme for Government** and all policy making.

The group were also in agreement that all three generations of rights should be built upon, discussing indivisibility, with a specific discussion around **environmental rights** and the **climate crisis**.

“Voice of the people central to a bill of rights”

“If you are going to have a bill of rights, why not have a very good one?”

“What is the right to health if you don’t have the right to clean air?”

“Environmental rights are much more fundamental than just having somewhere to go that is nice. Access to clean air, to clean water, to safe food, to a functioning climate system would be the basic minimum requirements when considering any environmental rights”

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities (Wednesday 28 April 2021)

29. The stakeholder event with the Black and Minority Ethnic Communities received great support, not least from the Inter Ethnic Forum who were instrumental in the promotion of the session. 27 people booked a place on the session, with **25 in attendance on the day**.

Question 1:

There was **unanimous** support for a bill of rights – the group felt that it was not only important, but **long overdue**.

Much of the discussion focussed on how Northern Ireland has changed since the Good Friday Agreement – there should be **less emphasis** on **orange/green** and more recognition of the **diversity of communities** today, and more recognition of ethnic background in policy and legislation. Other points raised included **intersectionality**, **anti-discrimination** and how a bill of rights should be **forward thinking**.

“It is critical that we have a bill of rights if we are to uphold, protect and extend human rights to every individual in NI”

“Specific to the Northern Ireland context in the twenty-first century”

“Give people the opportunity to own a bill of rights”

“It should enshrine rights for those from minority, racial and faith communities, not just contextualise rights as an orange and green sectarian issue”

Question 2:

The group were in **favour** of a preamble, and a lot of the discussion centred around the balance between **aspirational** and **actionable**. Some emphasised the need for a **cohesive set of values**. Participants also recognised that there may be budgetary constraints and wanted the preamble to be **realistic** as well.

When talking about values, the group highlighted the need for a **shared society, inclusivity, equality, dignity, understanding** and **oneness**.

In line with other groups, there was discussion around **rights education and accessibility**, including that a bill of rights should be available in different languages.

“A bill of rights should be a cohesive set of values”

“Everyone should feel that they have a future here”

“Recognition of the contribution the black and ethnic minority communities have made to society here”

“A bill of rights has to be inclusive and forward thinking but also has to be realistic in challenging those underlying and systemic inequalities across society”

“Values should be respect and dignity for every individual. If we take these away what are we left with?”

Question 3:

A wide range of rights were discussed by the group, most of them in the context of **racial discrimination**. These included the **right to vote, housing rights, right to education, right to assemble, cultural rights, language provision** and **the right to a free and fair trial**.

Once again, this was underpinned with the proviso that a bill of rights was **actionable** and **realistic**.

Some would like to see the incorporation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

“You can’t implement one set of rights without the other”

“Implementation of the Convention of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination”

“The right to enjoy your culture, if you don’t have that it leads to mental health issues”

“The right to multiple identities especially here in Northern Ireland. You can be Irish/British but you cannot be Irish/ British/ Kenyan”

Children and Young People (Wednesday 5 May 2021)

30. The stakeholder event with children and young people received bookings from 27 individuals, with **21 in attendance on the day**. A number of organisations were represented including the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, VOYPIC and the Children’s Law Centre.

31. The discussions with this group were supplemented by the use of ‘Jamboards’, an online tool that allows participants to post comments on a shared document. A copy of these documents have been provided at **Annexe A**.

Question 1:

There was **support** for a bill of rights from all participants, many stating that it would **enhance protections for minority groups** and generally help people.

Some participants highlighted some **issues** around a bill of rights, concerned that it may **increase tensions**. There was also comment on what a bill of rights would look like in the future in the context of **constitutional change**.

“Having a bill of rights would mean everyone can enjoy their rights equally”

“A bill of rights would help people”

“A bill of rights recognises the humanity and needs of all people in society regardless of constitutional politics and identity”

“It may be unnecessary - many of the proposed additions are already covered by pre-existing legislation”

Question 2:

There was a general agreement for the inclusion of a preamble, with discussions focussing on what values were important in a bill of rights. Some of the most popular values were **equality, respect, inclusion, independence, freedom** and **integration**.

“Equality has not been realised”

“Ending disparities and divides in our communities”

“A bill of rights applies to all”

“A lot of young people do not like the division and being associated with either one side or the other”

“The opening line should set the mood for what the whole document has to say”

Question 3:

The group were in agreement that they would like to see the full implementation of the **UNCRC**. Once again, the **protection of minority groups** was highlighted as very important.

The group also discussed rights relating to **healthcare, social media, language, education** and **mental health**. This group also felt that **environmental rights** were particularly important.

“The right to fair and truthful information”

“The right to be protected from discrimination”

“You should be able to identify as British, Irish or both”

“The right to be healthy and live in a good environment.”

Travellers (Facilitated by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive)

32. Whilst engagement with this group did not take place via an online stakeholder event, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive stated that this engagement *“covers the consensus of opinions over four sites currently managed by NIHE involving 10 families of 32 currently on site at this moment in time... other families either refused, had no interest or were absent”*.

Question 1:

It was felt that a bill of rights was important, especially if it addresses issues that are faced on a daily basis by this community. A bill of rights should protect their way of life and give them the same opportunities as everyone else.

“Yes its important, there are lots of laws that still don’t protect Travellers and sometimes criminalise our nomadic way of life – a bill of rights should protect my choice to take to the road and have access to decent sites on the way”

“Would that mean we can stop having to fight and wait so that we have the same chances, will it mean I can go with my brothers into a pub with no nonsense, my kids are served at the local sweet shop without hassle and we don’t need to book wedding venues under settled people’s names?”

Question 2:

The people the NIHE spoke to agreed that a values/vision section was **essential**. They feel that, in recent legislation and policy, Travellers are very rarely mentioned, and **their culture is not reflected in the typical green / orange approach**. It was also noted that the preamble should highlight that **not everyone is starting from the same position**.

“In recent legislation and policy Travellers are very rarely mentioned, our culture is not reflected in the typical green / orange approach or indeed when on occasion the needs of the wider BAME are included”

Question 3:

This group felt that there must be mechanism built in so that all government departments, agencies’ and arm’s length bodies are bound by the bill of rights at every level of their own organisations.

Some questions were raised about current legislation and practice; will a bill of rights supersede current legislation? Also, day to day practices of registering with a GP or changing address for benefits makes the right to be nomadic virtually untenable.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers (Facilitated by the Red Cross)

33. Whilst engagement with this group did not take place via an online stakeholder event, the Red Cross engaged with 26 individuals from Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Iran, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Malawi, Yemen, Algeria, Algeria with a variety of immigration status: asylum seeker, refugee, reunited family spouse and destitute (appeal rights exhausted).

34. There were workshops in English, Somali, Tigrinya and Arabic; each lasting 2 hours with a series of breakout rooms to explain a bill of rights. Participants were asked questions from the Committee’s survey and the full responses will be available in the Committee’s report. For consistency, a summary of the responses has been put into the same format as other groups.

Question 1:

The vast majority of the respondents felt that a bill of rights was **very important**.

"Fair processes are important to protect everyone equally. I think Northern Ireland does this well and it is important this is represented in the bill of rights"

Question 2:

The responses around the values that people would like to see highlighted **community, fairness, respect, justice, human dignity and equality.**

"Living in a community of mutual respect is really important. Where I live, they make sure that there is halal food available and offered for me and I see this as a sign of respect for my culture and my religion and this is really touching to me and important that everyone experiences this same level of respect towards their culture"

"Enable effective representation from ethnic communities"

"I think human dignity and respect from people in Northern Ireland is important to me and my family. We want to be part of the community in Belfast"

"You just need to walk outside on the street and you will see how differently people are treated"

Question 3:

A wide range of rights were mentioned in the context of **minority communities** and the issues faced by migrants and asylum seekers.

Respondents were keen for a **parity of rights**, regardless if you are a citizen here.

Some other rights mentioned were the **right to work**, the **right to education**, the **right to a living wage**, the **right to housing** and the **right to justice.**

"Good environment = healthy community"

"if you are an asylum seeker and you don't have the right to work or the right to an education, you are a burden on the government. If you work you could help yourself and put yourself in a good position. Working and

education is good for asylum seekers and for the government. It benefits both”

“I have left a country who is run a political system which is tyrant, everything is done by force. I cannot exercise a religion I choose or have the political views I wish in my home country. It is very important for me to have the freedom and peace of mind that I didn’t have in the country I have fled from”

“I also believe more protection is needed based on your race. I know of other people with my community background that have experienced racism in Northern Ireland both from local people and other ethnic communities”

“Right to receive the same opportunities as everyone else. Minority ethnic groups should be given the same opportunities as others, to help eradicate disadvantageous positions”

Homeless (Facilitated by Women’s Aid)

35. Whilst engagement with this group did not take place via an online stakeholder event, Women’s Aid stated that this engagement *“is a response from the women we asked to participate in the questionnaire on a bill of rights for Northern Ireland”*.

Question 1:

It was felt that a bill of rights was very important and should include so much more than what is already in the European Convention on Human Rights. It was also felt that a bill of rights would help everyone and be inclusive of all walks of life.

‘Yes it is very important and would change NI completely’

“It would help everyone and be inclusive of all walks of life”

Question 2:

The people that responded stated that people should have **respect for other people's values**. They felt that it was also important that everyone is treated **fairly**, especially when it comes to protestant/catholic background – there should be **no discrimination on religious beliefs**.

“Yes people should have respect for other people's values as we all need to live together amicably”

“Respecting and treating everyone as equals is fundamental to living in a safe environment”

“For Northern Ireland, we need to respect and treat everyone fairly and in particular to whether they come from a Protestant/ Catholic background and not discriminate based on religious beliefs.

Question 3:

A number of rights were mentioned including **victims' rights**, **same-sex marriage**, rights for **children** and **language** rights.

Some additional rights were raised including the right to the option of **euthanasia**, **shelter for all people who need access** and services around **domestic and sexual abuse**.

“Men and women should have access to the same services in regards to domestic and sexual abuse”

“Adequate housing for people who require extra rooms in their house for support/carers to stay overnight to help them”

School Children (Facilitated by the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service)

36. Colleagues in the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service conducted 15 virtual focus groups with 14 schools and with Springboard, an organisation which offers services to young people aged 16-24 within the Greater Belfast area.

37. A separate report has been produced to summarise the discussions in these focus groups.

Annexe A

Copies of the Jamboards produced during the children and young people stakeholder event on Wednesday 5 May 2021.

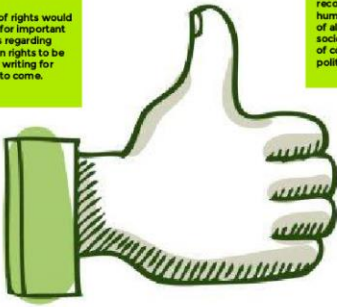


Do you think Northern Ireland should have a Bill of Rights?

Advantages

A bill of rights would allow for important points regarding human rights to be put in writing for years to come.

A bill of rights recognises the humanity and needs of all people in society, regardless of constitutional politics and identity



Disadvantages

Some people may be frustrated if they feel certain protections infringe upon their freedom of speech and religion



Yes!

It would give citizens greater protection over their rights and access to equality.

Allows a document for a "go-to" place to review all the rights prescribed by law.

I feel as though it would be sensible considering how controversial N.I can be with sectarianism. It would make people feel safer and more knowledgeable of the government

Place your post-it on the relevant images!

A bill of rights is necessary foundation before any more legislation is produced to prevent discrimination

It allows it easier to go to court for right infringements than Strasbourg that you can take whoever infringed it to a UK court.

Yes we should have a bill of rights

You can type what you want

definitely

It could increase tensions

There gonna be people that want to see it although other might go against it

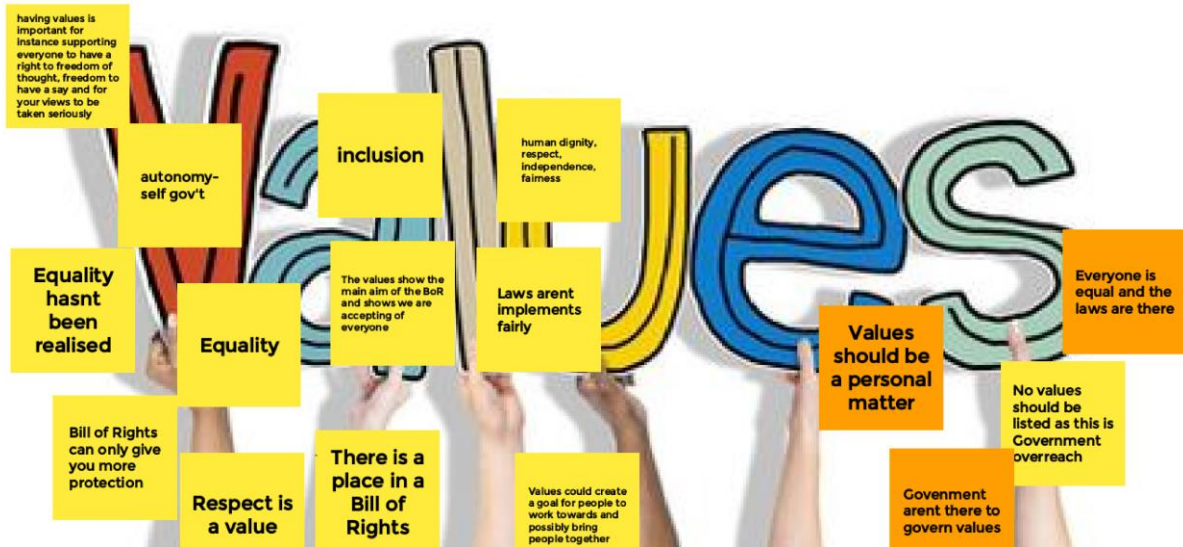
Disadvantages

Sinn Fein and DUP have to agree on things, so it would be hard to get it through or if United Ireland ever gets voted (Sinn Fein) our bill of rights would be changing - could be confusing

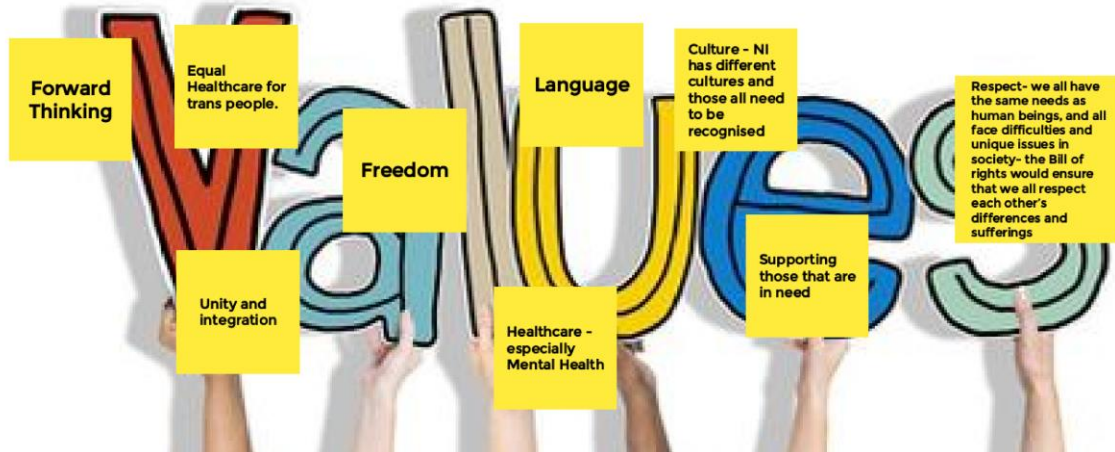
This means that it can be at hard to change legislation i.e. repeal it if it where codified in the statute books.

Can be politicised on what is a fundamental 'right' due to it being a contentious items. As it takes five parties to do this.

What if any, values do you think are important for Northern Ireland, that might be included in a preamble for a bill of rights?



What if any, values do you think are important for Northern Ireland, that might be included in a preamble for a bill of rights?



What if any, values do you think are important for Northern Ireland, that might be included in a preamble for a bill of rights?



What rights, if any, would you like to see protected in a bill of rights?



What rights, if any, would you like to see protected in a bill of rights?

